



The Dibble Institute

Resources for Teaching Relationship Skills
to Teens and Young Adults

Tips for teaching middle school students relationship skills:

1. Teach to the needs of the participants.

- Middle school students exhibit a wide range of maturities (i.e. 6th or 7th grade boys vs. 9th grade girls).
- Select a curriculum that considers their developmental level (perhaps Dating Smarts and Art of Loving Well for grades 6&7 and Relationship Smarts PLUS or Connections: Dating and Emotions for grades 8&9).
- Directly address with girls the issues around dating older boys/men. (i.e. maturity and age differences).
- Use the lessons to help teens get ready for high school (i.e. help them think through values, friendship, and sex issues before they occur.)
- If students are not yet dating, tweak the materials to emphasize establishing good friendships.
- Sometimes the 7th grade boy “weirdness” and lack of confidence has to do with their sensitivity to the changes are going in themselves and not because they are not interested.

2. Include their parents or guardians.

- Parents may have concerns especially about their immature students. Schedule a parents’ curriculum introduction night.
- Utilize the parent/student activities if the program has them.

3. Create an optimum learning environment

- Establishing good rapport with students early on. Classroom management skills and facilitation skills are essential.
- From the start, set group norms for respect and confidentiality.
- Keep the same adult teachers consistently through the program.
- Create a comfortable classroom environment. (i.e. keep a box for students to drop sensitive questions anonymously to be answered later.)
- Change activities at least every 20 minutes.
- Use older peers who have learned healthy relationship skills to help run activities.

4. Consider gender when teaching.

- Have a team of a male teacher and female teacher teach the relationship unit.
- Conduct single gender lessons and activities, from time to time, so students have the opportunity of asking questions without the opposite gender around.

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